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World War 1 Poetry CA

The First World War was one of the biggest conflicts in the history, causing millions of casualties. The whole strip of land from the French-German border to the La Manche canal was ravaged by trenches, artillery, battle gases, and soldiers of both sides. The soldiers were forced to live in inhuman conditions, unable to wash, sleep properly, and each day fearing for their lives. Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen were some of these soldiers. Seeing the appalling conditions they and their comrades were left in, they looked for a way to express their shock with the war. That way, for both of them, was poetry. “Glory of Women” is a sonnet by Siegfried Sassoon criticising the civilians on the home front of the 1st World War, notably the women. On the other hand, Wilfred Owen's “Anthem for Doomed Youth” is a sonnet dedicated to remember the memory of the dead soldiers of World War 1.

Siegfried Sassoon explores in his sonnet the British home front. He begins with saying in what the home front believes in, and that is an image of a glorified British soldier, who is respected and worshipped by women. Sassoon says that the women “love us when we're heroes, home on leave / Or wounded in a mentionable place”, showing how the civilians believe that what happens on the front is quite trivial: it is a field of glory that awaits for it's conqueror. He continues with the depiction of the civilian beliefs, saying that they “worship decorations”, and they “believe/ That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace”. The civilians of the First World War actually believed that the war was some sort of a Great Adventure, that the boys went on to grow up and come back victorious, after ending the war with a giant cavalry charge of gentlemen soldiers. The “chivalry redeems the war's disgrace” actually suggests that the real side of the war, the one that only the soldiers truly know and the civilians only heard about, can be hidden under a blanked of gallantry and the chivalrous behaviour of the soldiers. That belief was sustained by the very active propaganda, showing them the glorious British soldier defending the homeland from the bloodthirsty German soldiers.

Sassoon then follows with criticism of the society, who actually believes these lies and continue to fuel the war. The author shows it with the words addressed to the women: “You make us shells.”, directly referencing the munitionettes, and partly blaming them for that the war continues. He goes on by telling how the women take part in the fuelling of the war with their delight for “tales of dirt and danger”, with which they are “fondly thrilled”. In Sassoon's poem that fanaticism reaches the point that the women even “crown our distant ardours while we fight,/And mourn our laurelled memories when we're killed.”, giving the reader an impression that the First World War might be for the women the same thing as were the Gladiator fights for the Romans: a form of amusement in exchange for the lives of the soldiers.

Following that suggestion, Sassoon finally transforms his pity for the civilian's naivety and openly shows his disgust and despise for them, writing about how looks the real side of the war, which the society rejects: they “can't believe that British troops 'retire'/ When hell's last horror breaks them, and they run,” The society refuses the image of the British soldier that breaks down. They refuse to see the grim side of the war: soldiers “Trampling the terrible corpses – blind with blood.”. Sassoon shows the soldiers blind with someone's blood, becoming almost like animals, while the civilians are also blind, but they are blind with propaganda leaflets. In the end, he changes his tone to a more thoughtful one when he talks about the “German mother dreaming by the fire”, knitting socks for his son, who's “face is trodden deeper in the mud.”. In fact, this situation is not only present on one side of the front, but it is universal. The reader could also feel a sense of guilt after Sassoon's previous accusations, he could feel guilty for seeing that family broken, even if it's the so told enemy.

On the other hand, Wilfred Owen in his sonnet “Anthem for Doomed Youth” talks about the subject closer to the front: the casualties of the war. He talks about how the many soldiers that are dead can't even have a proper burial. The title of his sonnet already introduces the reader into the sorrowful feeling of the poem, the “Doomed Youth” suggests that this is the fate of the young who go to the war, and the many more to come. Owen then continues to show the reader the scale of the casualties of the war: “these who die as cattle” emphasises the number of casualties by comparing the dead to animals. This execution is possible by the “monstrous anger of the guns” and “wailing shells”, artillery of all sorts, the “stuttering rifles' rapid rattle”, alliteration that shows the machine guns devastating results. These means of death are compared with religious symbols like “orisons”, “bells” and “prayers”. These religious symbols reference traditional Christian burials that all dead should have. Instead, they receive a trench burial: the dead are left where they died, with the guns acting as their choirs, while they increase their death toll.

In addition, Wilfred Owen shows his reader the reactions of the families to the death of their loved ones: the boys “holy glimmers of goodbyes”, the tears shed after someone that we loved has dies, and “The pallor of girls' brows”. The reader understands then that the family will be left only with the news, but there will be no body to honour. Just an empty coffin to bury and grieve over the sorrowful news. With this depressing image, Owen shows how dehumanised the war has become, that even the families can't perform their last honours to their loved ones, and the dead are left to rot instead. The frequent use of comparisons in his sonnet emphasise the difference between a “normal” burial and the war burial. Owen finally ends his poem with the image of a “slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds”, showing the reader that this is the dawn of humanity: the men will just keep killing each other, without any respect to the fallen and their families.

Both of these sonnets are a testimonial to the atrocities of the First World War, revolving around one point: the dehumanisation of the human race. The continuous war, supported by the brain-washed civilians, the enemies portrayed as mindless beasts, no respects given to the dead and the overall depressing image of the war are portrayed in Siegfried Sassoon's and Wilfred Owen's sonnets.